

PDC 17: Northern Neck

Introduction

The Northern Neck encompassing 8,200 square miles is a special and unique place in the Commonwealth. The region is a tapestry of farms, vast tracts of forest and tidal saltwater fishing spots. Unspoiled wetlands and tidal creeks and marshes entice canoeists and kayakers to enjoy the solitude. Captain John Smith was perhaps the Northern Neck's first tourist and called the area "a place heaven and earth never agree more to man's habitation. Some years later George Washington referred to the Northern Neck as "the Garden of Virginia". The region is steeped in history attracting tourists to historic villages and offering opportunities to learn about marine lore in the waterfront villages of Reedville and Irvington. Tourism, outdoor recreation, history and the natural resources of the Northern Neck beckon visitors to escape urban life and the sprawl of suburban growth.

Historically, the surrounding regions have seen unprecedented growth and urbanization, while the Northern Neck remains among the least-developed localities in the Tidewater region of Virginia. Development pressures from more urbanized areas and the attractiveness of the region for retirement continue to influence population increases in the Northern Neck. Overall population growth in the 1990's was 11.7 percent compared to 14.4 percent statewide. Most of the growth in the Northern Neck was due to in-migration. The average population growth rate for the region is anticipated to grow to 57,200 by 2020 representing a 16% increase in growth from 2005. A commitment to resource based tourism and to the quality of life in the area will help maintain the Northern Neck's character and the economic stability of the region.

Geographic characteristics

The Potomac and Rappahannock rivers and the Chesapeake Bay form the boundaries for the Northern Neck Planning District. The region includes four counties: Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmoreland, and has a 2005 population estimated at 49,353. There are 492,800 land acres and 42,433 water acres in the region. There are more than 1,000 miles of shoreline, which comprises 38% of the total Tidewater shoreline in Virginia. Wetlands cover 37,890 acres in the region. Water-related and other natural resources are abundant, making this district one of the most important for environmental and conservation planning in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Demand/survey findings

As indicated in the 2006 *Virginia Outdoors Survey*, the most popular outdoor activities in the region are related to the use of water resources and beaches along with walking and bicycling trails. Fishing ranked highest among the water-related recreation followed closely by swimming and boating. Respondents to the survey indicated that access to water was a definite need that is not being met adequately, especially with the numbers of tourists anticipated to increase. There is a similar deficiency in limited number of trail miles available for walking, hiking, bicycling, jogging and horseback

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riding. In addition, public playgrounds separate from those associated with local schools and public swimming pools were listed as desired community amenities.

As localities plan for the future to meet the outdoor recreational needs of their residents they are encouraged to include small neighborhood parks, larger regional facilities and trails linking communities and water access points. The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey and inventory shows a need for additional active recreation facilities, especially basketball courts, multipurpose fields for soccer and football. In addition, the Northern Neck remains an area with interests in recreational activities such as hunting and off road motorcycling that require a large land base. Other areas of need for recreational activities include playgrounds, bicycle facilities, access to water for boating, canoeing, kayaking, fishing and swimming. Trails, blueways and greenways linking existing recreational, historic, cultural and natural resources could increase the number of miles of trails suitable for walking, bicycling and boating. In addition, continuing to promote and form linkages between historical, scenic and cultural resources is supported by survey results that indicate that visiting historic sites is second in popularity to walking for pleasure.

Specific needs have been identified in the Northern Neck region. These include:

- Additional basketball and volleyball courts.
- Large tracts of land open for off road motorcycling and hunting.
- Hiking and backpacking trails.
- Water access sites for fishing, swimming and boating.
- Facilities for nature study.
- Multipurpose fields for soccer and football

Outdoor Recreation

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The Northern Neck Tourism Council maintains a comprehensive list of outdoor recreational opportunities at <http://www.northernneck.org/>.

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The following are general recommendations for meeting outdoor recreation needs in the region.

- Local agencies in partnership with state and federal agencies should ensure that adequate supplies of recreation and open space are provided to meet demand and that those areas and facilities are adequately staffed, funded, and maintained. A dedicated funding source for the acquisition, management and maintenance of recreation areas and facilities should be considered a priority.
- Activity user groups along with local parks and recreation departments should continue to educate outdoor recreation enthusiasts to be cognizant of the impacts they have on others to minimize user conflicts and increase economic and natural resource sustainability.

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- Local, state and federal government should provide the appropriate number and venue of opportunities for the Commonwealth's population to enjoy and access outdoor environments.
- State and local parks and recreation departments should provide opportunities to learn responsible use of public lands through the teaching of *Leave No Trace* and *Tread Lightly!*.
- DCR and other natural resource agencies should provide leadership by example in operations and maintenance on behalf of conservation and outdoor ethics.
- Property owners should promote management techniques that promote safe outdoor recreation environments.

Land Conservation

The land conservation map for the region includes existing conservation land in the following categories.

- State/Federal conservation lands: split by state and federal management agencies
- Local open space lands
- Conservation easements
- Designated historic districts and eligible historic districts

The acreages for each land conservation category are shown on the map. Future land conservation needs and direction should relate to the remaining resources that warrant protection for water quality, habitat, quality of life and economic viability of the area. Many organizations work together with localities and the region to provide an array of land conservation mechanisms. (See Chapter III. Land Conservation)

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Land Trusts Operating in the Northern Neck Region

- Virginia Outdoors Foundation
- Northern Neck Land Conservancy
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- Potomac Conservancy
- APVA Preservation Virginia
- Land Trust of Virginia
- The 500-Year Forest Foundation
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General recommendation for land conservation include:

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- All localities should continue to promote the conservation and preservation of open space through land acquisition, conservation easements, stewardship agreements, the development of agricultural and forestal districts, the outright purchase of land or any of the many open space protection strategies presented in chapter III. Land Conservation.
- As population growth accelerates development pressure, land conservation and sound land use decision-making must become prominent considerations in all land-planning efforts. Localities, state agencies, and private organizations must make deliberate decisions about how to focus and prioritize their land conservation efforts. To do so, they must develop a method of targeting conservation efforts, using green infrastructure land planning techniques, geographic information systems, local comprehensive plans, and decision support systems such as the Virginia Conservation Lands Needs Assessment.

Meeting conservation goals will require partnerships among all agencies.

Green Infrastructure

The following are regional recommendations for implementation of green infrastructure planning concepts presented in Chapter IV. Green Infrastructure.

- Local governments should take the lead in securing green infrastructure through planning tools.
- Regional and local governments should adopt and implement the green infrastructure planning model to ensure sustainable development of their community and a high quality of life for future generations.
- Local and regional agencies and conservation organizations should receive information and education about green infrastructure planning including guidance on local zoning initiatives that lead to changes in community design and transportation systems.
- Sources of funding for local government green infrastructure initiatives should be identified and sought.

Programs

The programs listed in this subsection outline recommendations related to statewide initiatives for outdoor recreation and conservation. The program areas include: Trails and Greenways, Blueways and Water Access, Historic and Landscape Resources, Scenic Resources, Scenic Highways/Virginia Byways, Scenic Rivers, Watersheds and Environmental and Land Stewardship Education.

Trails & Greenways

Trail and greenway planning initiated at the local and regional level is important for the future development of an infrastructure that promotes public health. Only a handful of local governments have a formally adopted trails plan. With only a small percentage of existing plans approved and integrated into the locality's comprehensive plan, there is a risk that development will continue to occur without consideration for people who want to integrate exercise into their daily routine by walking, jogging or cycling to points of interest. Each locality should develop a trail and greenway plan, bicycle and pedestrian plan, and/or green infrastructure plan incorporating trails that will be adopted as a formal component of the comprehensive plan. In the plan, an effort should be made to link existing and proposed public lands and other resources valued by the community with businesses and neighborhoods.

Trunkline trails are statewide corridors connecting urban, suburban and rural areas of Virginia. Plans to establish routes and connect with other local and regional trails are important to the success of these major trails. Local, regional and state planners should work together to mediate issues that arise when trails cross jurisdictional boundaries, to provide bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure (including signage and amenities) and to get information out to the public. Trunkline trails existing or underway in Virginia include:

[subsection of Trails and Greenways]Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST) connects the outstanding natural and cultural features along a 700-mile corridor of the Potomac River from the Chesapeake Bay to the Allegheny Highlands. The National Park System manages this partnership, which has been the target of significant investments in funds, time and expertise by individuals, organizations and government agencies.

There are currently 27 National Heritage Areas in the United States. For the Northern Neck, designation would mean a great opportunity, via federal funding, for local residents to manage and develop the region's historical and natural assets in a way that best suits local interests, as defined by the various comprehensive plans adopted and being adopted by the counties and towns of the Northern Neck.

The National Park Service defines a national heritage area as a place designated by Congress "where natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinct landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. These patterns make National Heritage Areas representative of the national experience through the physical features that remain and the traditions that have evolved in them. Continued use of National Heritage Areas by people whose traditions helped to shape the landscapes enhances their significance."

The Northern Neck Regional Commission was contracted to recommend an implementation concept for the PHNST. The report recommends priority actions for

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funding consideration that are compatible with the Trails Act. The actions are designed both to move the project forward and to demonstrate the trail's potential. Of primary importance are the counties with Potomac shoreline. However, on the Northern Neck, the heritage of the Potomac is inextricably bound to the heritage of the Rappahannock River. With this in mind, the recommendation was made for Richmond and Lancaster counties to participate in the project to the extent they desire.

It is important to note the role of the National Park Service in administering the PHNST project according to authorizing legislation no federal land can be purchased specifically for PHNST. The role of the PHNST office is to promote coordination and provide technical assistance in planning and identifying potential sources of public funding. This provision for technical service may be extended to private sector entities wishing to make the PHT a consideration in planning processes. Over the long term, the development of blueways or a water trail along the Potomac and in selected tributaries could be desirable.

The PHNST could become the thread from which a vibrant environmentally-based economic development strategy could be woven, tying together existing historic and natural resources such as George Washington's Birthplace, Westmoreland State Park, Caledon Natural Area, and the Steamboat Era Museum in Irvington.

[Begin Textbox]"With the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown," former Secretary Murphy says, "there is no more fitting time for the Northern Neck to be designated a National Heritage Area. And though a National Heritage Area is designated by an act of Congress through a National Park Service program, management and oversight remain with the local governments," he added, "so there is no danger of federal regulations being imposed on local land use from outside." End Textbox]

General recommendations related to trails and greenways include:

- Local governments should have a greenways and trails component in their comprehensive plan that provides for a variety of leisure trail experiences and promotes pedestrian and bicycle transportation alternatives.
- State, regional and local governments should include funds for trail development, management and maintenance in annual capital and operating budgets, and seek creative ways to provide incentive funding for trail development.
- State, regional and local governments should strengthen the public's understanding of the connection between trails and public health and establish policies that support pedestrian and bicycle facilities in road construction and development/redevelopment projects.

- DCR should partner with Planning District Commissions to a) facilitate communications between trail providers, users, and policy makers, b) encourage the private sector to improve regional and statewide trail opportunities and support and c) focus on regional trail networks to establish a trunkline statewide trail system.
- Local and regional trail managers should provide information about their trail at trailheads, in brochures and on Web sites so that users can choose sections within their skill and capability levels.

Specific trails and greenways recommendations for the Northern Neck include:

- 1 Complete a water trail and bicycle route from Washington's Birthplace in Westmoreland County to Ferry Farm to Mount Vernon.
- 2 Develop a parking lot, trails and interpretive sign at Monroe's Birthplace in Westmoreland County.
- 3 Explore scenic alternatives for development of multiuse trail route between Ferry Farm and the Potomac River waterfront attractions in Westmoreland County.
- 4 Incorporate the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail into local comprehensive plans.
- 5 Support the National Park Service's Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail along the lower Potomac region to create connections by water by developing water trails and making appropriate land connections for vehicles and bicyclists to key tourist destination sites.
- 6 A specific route for bicycling between northern Stafford County and the Town of Reedville in Northumberland County with extensions to Caledon Natural Area and to Irvington will serve as a connecting route to the Potomac Heritage Trail blueway.

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Bicycle Heritage Tour of The Northern Neck

Promoted by: the Northern Neck Tourism Council

800-393-6180

nntc@northernneck.org

<http://www.northernneck.org>

Catpoint Creek Loop – 20 miles

Popes Creek Loop 35-50 miles

Christ Church – Windmill Point Loop – 22 miles

Reedville Loop – 25 miles

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Blueways & Water Access

Water has always been key to life in the Northern Neck. The accessibility of the Northern Neck's water resources for all the citizens and visitors is paramount to the economic stability and aesthetic appeal for the quality of life the region offers. Water access is one of the highest recreational demands in Virginia with fishing ranking 7th and boating 10th in popularity. State agencies should work with the Northern Neck Public Access Authority to obtain funding for additional public access sites, especially at previous ferry landing locations.

Access to Virginia's rivers and streams is necessary to meet water-related recreational demands. While this region has an abundance of water resources, availability of public access needs to be increased. Wherever highways cross bodies of water and renovation or relocation is planned, the potential for providing parking areas and boat and fishing access should be incorporated into the road improvement. Certainly areas where public access has historically occurred should remain open after road improvements are in place. *The Chesapeake Bay Area Public Access Plan* could assist in determining the areas of greatest need for additional public access. Where opportunities are available, lands should be acquired or use agreements arranged to help meet the demand for public access. Where appropriate, portages should be created around dams and other river obstacles.

Within the region there are many state owned road rights-of-way that end at the water's edge. Many of these served as public access points to the rivers when much of the regional commerce traveled by water. These properties should be evaluated to determine if there is clear public ownership. Those that are publicly owned should be evaluated for their potential to meet water access needs.

General beach access recommendations for the region include:

- Cooperative agreements among localities and other agencies, as well as private landowners, are encouraged in order to meet the increasing need for public access to beaches and other water-related recreational resources.
- In cooperation with localities, state land management agencies should identify strategies to make additional waterfront resources available for public use.
- Adequate support facilities and services, such as restrooms, concessions, parking and maintenance should be a priority for existing and proposed public water and beach access areas.
- Public agencies need to acquire and/or maintain access to existing public beaches that may be jeopardized by changes in land use or development activities.

General water trail recommendations for the region include:

- The navigable rivers of the state should be managed as water trails. Public access areas and support facilities should be developed at appropriate intervals along these rivers.
- Regional and local governments should work with state agencies to market water trails through brochures, maps, signage and the media.
- Local jurisdictions should encourage both private and public landowners to operate rest stops and boat-in-only campgrounds along water trails at suitable site locations along Virginia rivers and streams.

General water access recommendations for the region include:

- Old ferry crossings/landing site sand bridges should be considered for opportunities for water access.
- Provide an additional 49 water access points in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Virginia to meet the commitments of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement.

Specific water access recommendations for the Northern Neck region include:

7 Assess the availability of former steamboat landings in tributary streams and on the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers.

8 A water trail and bicycle route from Washington's Birthplace in Westmoreland County to Ferry Farm to Mount Vernon.

9 Develop water-to-land access between Stratford Hall Plantation and George Washington's Birthplace National Monument.

10 Develop a canoe/kayak camping area along the shoreline within Westmoreland State Park.

11 Developing water trail segments in Rappahannock tributaries in Richmond and Lancaster Counties.

12 Develop the Monroe Bay water trail segment incorporating James Monroe Birthplace in Westmoreland County.

13 Develop the water trail segment from Hughlett's Point to Dameron Marsh Kayak Trail in Northumberland County.

14 Develop the water trail segment for Cat Point Creek in Richmond County.

15 Provide water overlooks at **Powers Land** and other bay and river resources of the region.

16 Consider **Vir Mar Beach** as an enhanced access point to the bay to include picnic and parking areas.

Historic and Landscape Resources

The economic future of the Northern Neck may be in heritage tourism and the proud preservation of historical landmarks. The PD identifies pursuit of National Heritage Area in their 2006 – 2007 work plan. The Northern Neck Farm Museum, Christ Church, James Monroe and George Washington birthplaces, Stratford Hall, Hughlett Tavern as well as several other points of historical significance make this region a natural setting for historical landmark preservation. The Northern Neck Tourism and the Northern Neck Planning District has worked to connect and promote many of the historic resources along with the culturally rich landscapes. In addition to continuing this successful marketing strategy, the following general recommendations are made to conserve and enhance the historic resources in the Northern Neck.

- Incorporate the National Park Service's Captain John Smith National Historic Trail in local comprehensive plans as a way to further heritage and ecotourism in the region.
- Each locality in the region should make every effort to identify historic and archaeological resources within each jurisdiction that can be used for economic, tourism, recreational and educational benefits, and should include those resources in all local land use planning and decision-making processes to promote preservation and protection of these resources.
- Local historic attractions, historical societies, museums and other tourism organizations in the region should build partnerships with the Virginia Association of Museums, Virginia Civil War Trails, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities/Preservation Virginia, the Virginia Main Street Program and others to enhance local heritage tourism, educational and recreational offerings.
- Local governments and private organizations owning historic properties in the region should be encouraged to manage those properties effectively for long-term protection of the public trust and to maximize public benefit consistent with the nature of the historic property.

Scenic Resources

General recommendations for scenic resources include:

- Each locality should conduct a visual resources assessment as part of their green infrastructure inventory and mapping process. Consider using universities and other institutions to help supplement and support this effort.

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- Localities should ensure that a component of their comprehensive plan provides for the protection and enhancement of scenic resources, visual character and viewsheds.
- Localities should develop corridor management plans for scenic byways, blueways, and greenways to assure preservation of the scenic quality of the corridor.

Scenic Highways/Virginia Byways

The Northern Neck Planning District coordinates transportation initiatives for the region. The annual 2006-2007 Planning District work plan includes nomination and designation of Virginia Byways.

General recommendation include:

- The PD should partner with local governments state and professional organizations to determine implementation strategies to protect existing scenic assets along existing and potential scenic corridors.

The following roads should be considered for inclusion as Virginia Byway.

- 17** State Routes 205 and 3 in Westmoreland County, and
- 18** US 360 in Richmond and Northumberland Counties.

Scenic Rivers

Currently there are no Virginia Scenic Rivers designated in the Northern Neck region.

General recommendations for the region's potential scenic rivers include:

- Local government should nominate candidate streams and rivers for study and possible Scenic River designation.
- DCR should assist local governments with development of planning tools (e.g., land-use overlays, corridor management plans) that will afford special recognition and protection to Virginia's Scenic Rivers.

The following river segments should be evaluated to determine suitability as a Virginia Scenic River.

19 The **Piankatank River** from Route 17 to the Chesapeake Bay has been evaluated and found to quality.

20 The **Rappahannock River** from the Route 3 bridge at Ferry Farm in Westmoreland County to the Chesapeake Bay has potential components and should be evaluated.

21The **Corrotoman River** in Lancaster County.

22 **Cat Point Creek** from Rt. 622 to its junction with the Rappahannock River.

Watershed Resources

The Northern Neck is included in both the Shenandoah/Potomac watershed and the Rappahannock watershed. A list of watershed groups that facilitate local stewardship are listed below:

(watershed organization list to be added).

General watershed recommendations include:

- Regional and local governments should protect the management of watersheds by integrating watershed management planning with local land use ordinances and comprehensive plans through DCR's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act land use management initiative (omit yellow for non-Bay PDCs).
- Regional and local governments should protect the management of watersheds by integrating watershed management planning with local land use ordinances and comprehensive plans through DCR's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act land use management initiative.

Environmental and Land Stewardship Education

Outdoor Environmental Education needs are being assessed for each region. The information about potential outdoor education facility needs will be identified in a later draft.

General recommendations for environmental and land stewardship include:

- Federal, state, regional and local agencies will provide citizens access to stewardship education and conservation resources.
- Federal, state, regional and local agencies will promote the value and benefits of outdoor experiences and their relationship to environmentally literate citizenry.

Federal Facilities

The National Park Service, the US Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service all own and operate lands in the Northern Neck that contribute to the region's outdoor recreation and conservation land base. These agencies in partnership with the state, regional and local partners have identified recommendations listed below.

National Parks Recommendations

General recommendations for National Park service facilities include:

- Continue to develop multi-modal connections to NPS sites, as a component of an interconnected, statewide system of trails and greenways. Support efforts underway at parks such as Petersburg, Appomattox, and Richmond that are currently engaged in efforts to link battlefields, historic sites, parks, and communities.

- Work with state agencies to elevate battlefield protection in various land conservation, scenic viewshed, and heritage preservation initiatives. Utilizes partnerships to identify, prioritize, and develop strategies to protect critical resources.
- Continue collaborative efforts through the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Program and Potomac Heritage National Scenic to connect people to heritage, outdoor recreation, and educational opportunities and resources.

Specific Park Service Recommendations for the Northern Neck region include:

The **Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST)** is a partnership initiative to develop and maintain a system of trails for recreation, transportation, health, and education. The trail connects the outstanding natural and cultural features along a 700-mile corridor of the Potomac River from the Chesapeake Bay to the Allegheny Highlands.

The PHNST provides a forum for regional coordination and communication among the numerous communities in the corridor, with NPS providing overall guidance in development of the network. The trail corridor is managed collaboratively by National Park Service units, local, state, and regional partners. Working together, partners are achieving diverse goals from developing a sustainable transportation system for an expanding urban area, to linking conservation lands as part of an extensive green infrastructure network. In addition, the PHNST provides an avenue for exploration and learning about the regions' unique historic, cultural, and natural resources and landscapes, serving as an outdoor classroom for young and old.

The George Washington Birthplace National Monument is one of the priority sites on the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. One of the biggest management issues for the site is preserving the cultural landscape. In addition, the Birthplace has been working collaboratively with a number of partners on regional trail and heritage tourism efforts. The Birthplace is working with Virginia DCR and the PHNST Superintendent to implement the trail on the Northern Neck. In addition, the Birthplace is a recognized site on the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, developed collaboratively by the DGIF, and both George Washington Birthplace and Westmoreland State Park are designated sites in the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network Program. Vidal Martinez, Superintendent (804) 224-1732

National Wildlife Refuges & Fish Hatcheries

On March 8, 2006 the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge was designated a Chesapeake Bay Gateways Site. The CBGN is an interconnected series of sites that improve access to the Chesapeake Bay, and that enhance the interpretation and conservation of its resources.

The Rappahannock River Valley NWR was established in 1996 to protect outstanding fish and wildlife habitat that exists in and along the river. The USFWS set a land protection goal for the refuge of 20,000 acres in seven counties, flanking both sides of the river from Skinkers Neck south to Belle Island State Park . As of 2005, the USFWS had acquired nearly 8,000 acres from willing sellers, including 1,400 acres under conservation easement. USFWS I April 2006 began a 2 year effort to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

The USFWS will coordinate and implement the following recommendations with regard to outdoor recreation and the NWRs.

23 Continue to explore opportunities to acquire additional sites along the Potomac River to help protect eagle habitat and other natural heritage resources.

State Facilities

State Parks

Due to the extremely high demand for public access to the waters of the Commonwealth, any large acreage waterfront property that becomes available on the major tidal rivers or their tributaries in the region should be evaluated for potential acquisition and development as a regional or state park. Any site acquired and developed on these waters would also help to meet the commitments of the 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement.

Projects identified in approved master plans need to be funded. State park master plans must be revisited by DCR staff every five years; any significant changes not identified in the current, approved master plan, or improvements/additions costing in excess of \$500,000, must go through the public participation process.

24 Belle Isle State Park (733 acres) is located on the Rappahannock River in Lancaster County. The park has seven miles of frontage on the north shore of the Rappahannock, and it borders Deep and Mulberry creeks. Purchased in 1993, the park offers overnight accommodations in the Bel Air Mansion and Guest House. The park has a boat launch on Deep Creek and offers canoe rentals on Mulberry Creek. The diverse tidal and nontidal wetlands, lowland marshes, tidal coves and upland forests create numerous opportunities for environmental education and interpretive programming. The park has a 28 site full service campground and a new visitor center, funded by the 2002 GOB. The new visitor center will allow for a greatly expanded interpretive and educational opportunity of the park's unique natural and cultural resources. The park should be incorporated into the National Park Service's Captain John Smith National Historic Trail as well as into future Rappahannock River Water Trail initiatives, with its potential for canoe-in campsites.

25 Westmoreland State Park (1299 acres) located in Westmoreland County. One of six original Virginia state parks, established in 1936, the park is listed as a historic district on the state and national historic registers. The park provides traditional recreational offerings including cabins, camping, swimming, trails and river access. The park's natural and cultural features create ample opportunity for interpretive and educational opportunities both on land and on the river. Located on the Potomac River Water Trail, the park's master plan proposes the development of canoe-in camping. The park could also be a point of interest on the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. Other trail opportunities include links between George Washington's birthplace and Stratford Hall. The 2002 GOB provides funding for a much needed visitor center office complex which will create expanded opportunities for interpreting the park.

State Fish and Wildlife Management Areas

- The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries should continue to develop trail systems within wildlife management areas to facilitate access throughout the property for a variety of recreational activities including hunting and fishing.
- The Northern Neck PD's annual work plan for 2006-2007 indicates they will continue to assist the DGIF with further planning, development and marketing of the Coastal Wildlife and Birding Trail.

(specific recommendations for WMA not available at this time)

VMRC

Continue promotion of saltwater recreational fishing opportunities in the Commonwealth through continued construction of new reef sites, and augmentation of existing artificial fishing reef sites.

State Forests

General recommendations for State Forests include:

- DOF will coordinate with, and seek the assistance of, local trail and river user organizations to develop forest trails and publish maps for each state forest as well as establish greenways and blueways for public use.
- Localities should work with DOF to stress the importance of the urban canopy and help localities set goals.
- Localities should work with DOF to demonstrate the importance of a healthy urban tree canopy and develop strategies to enhance the urban forest.

Specific recommendations for State Forests include:

26 The Virginia Tech Forest Management Station in Richmond County has 55 acres of land that may be suitable for dispersed recreation, such as hiking, picnicking and nature study.

27 Chilton Woods State Forest, located in Lancaster County, should include conservation education opportunities and passive recreational activities.

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Natural Areas

(not updated at this time)

The following natural area preserves are located within this district: **Hickory Hollow** in Lancaster County, and **Bush Mill Stream, Dameron Marsh, and Hughlett Point** in Northumberland County.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation has, as of March 2001, documented 183 occurrences of 16 rare species and natural communities in the Northern Neck Planning District. Two species are globally rare and two are federally threatened or endangered. Thirty-seven conservation sites have been identified in the district; only 3 (8%) have received any level of protection through ownership or management by state, federal and non-government organizations.

DCR recommends that the 34 unprotected conservation sites be targeted for future protection efforts. The appropriate method of protection will vary with each site but may include placing the site on Virginia's Registry of Natural Areas, developing a voluntary management agreement with the landowner, securing a conservation easement through a local land trust, acquiring the site through a locality or local land trust, dedicating the site as a natural area preserve with the current owner, or acquiring the site as a state natural area preserve.

Transportation Programs

The Northern Neck PDC coordinates transportation initiatives for the region. Their annual work plan for 2006-2007 indicates the Rideshare Program will continue. The PDC is also committed to continuing work on regional multi-use trail networks and the Potomac Heritage Trail as well as other water trails. General recommendations include:

- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on providing alternatives to the use of private automobiles for daily activities. Transit systems, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, improved community design, as well as a change in people's attitudes toward transportation alternatives will be needed for the transportation system of the future to meet capacity needs and energy constraints.
(www.vtrans.org)
- Priority should be given to eliminating potential transportation barriers for the public, and improving the linkages of recreation areas across major transportation corridors.
- Local governments should encourage the development of a permanent process for integrating the recommendations of local public health agencies and active living into all phases of land use planning.

Other State Facilities (Colleges, Universities, Estuarine Research Reserves)

(Not updated at this time)

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The following state-owned properties contain significant undeveloped land that may have potential for recreational use. Each site should be assessed, and cooperative use agreements developed where appropriate.

28 The Vera Knols Tract, located in Northumberland County and administered by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, should be maintained as a natural area.

29 Rappahannock Community College in Richmond County has 118 acres of land, which should be evaluated for its recreational potential.

Local & Regional Parks

Local Parks & Recreation Programs

One of the largest voids in parks and recreation departments across the state is in the Northern Neck region. Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond and Westmoreland counties do not employ a full-time parks and recreation director. These localities have turned any recreation programming over to private service providers. While private organizations may provide recreation programming in the short term, they are not charged with planning for the long term recreation, park and open space needs of a community. With populations anticipated to increase in each of these counties, this is a troubling trend. According to the Commonwealth of Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, Comparative Report on Local Government Revenues and Expenditures, Year Ended June 30, 2005, per capita spending on parks and recreation for each locality in this region was: Westmoreland \$10.33; Richmond, \$40.59; Northumberland, \$3.88 and Lancaster, \$6.52. This compares to a statewide per capita spending on parks and recreation of \$55.31, including \$85.51 from Towns, \$43.75 from counties, and \$76.45 per capita spending on parks and recreation from Cities in Virginia.

General parks and recreation recommendations include:

- Localities should appoint a parks and recreation commission to provide citizen leadership with regard to parks and recreation issues and concerns. Commissions have been effective in many localities to enhance park areas and recreation programs. This is most important in localities where no parks and recreation department exists.
- Commitments to the maintenance, management, and development of local parks and recreational systems are necessary. Localities should explore alternative methods of funding, such as set-aside ordinances, fees and charges and public/private partnerships. The establishment of a “friends group,” which could possibly evolve into a “park foundation,” should be considered for the local parks and recreation department. This citizens group could be a source of volunteers, as well as a source for community support and other resources.

- Local parks and recreation departments should initiate a structured volunteer program that recruits, trains and retains volunteers, and recognizes their contributions to parks, programs and the overall quality of life in communities.
- All localities should develop and implement hiking and bicycling plans to connect parks, schools and neighborhoods. Encouraging biking and walking within the community can enhance community health and spirit.
- Parks and programs need to be accessible to special populations, including senior adults and persons with disabilities.
- Consideration by localities of the benefit of a school/park cooperative agreement could enhance use of school and park facilities. School systems and local parks and recreation departments should cooperate in the design of new or renovated facilities. In order to increase local access, localities should consider cooperative management for the recreational use of private, corporate, state or federally owned lands.
- All public playgrounds, including school and park playgrounds, should meet or exceed the guidelines established by the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission and published in the USCPSC Handbook for Public Playground Safety. All equipment should have a cushioned surface under and around it.
- Localities should explore turning abandoned landfills into new and needed parks. From Virginia Beach to New York City to Berkeley California, localities have found they can add parkland, while removing community eyesores.
http://ga0.org/ct/x7LKtNM1_RZ8/landfill_to_parks

Local and Regional Park Facilities

There are no regional parks that are locally owned or operated in partnership with multiple organizations and agencies. It is important to meet the outdoor recreation needs for a growing region, to initiative development of a system of local and regional parks that will supplement the base of state and federally owned lands.

Specific recommendations for regionally based parks in the Northern Neck include:

Development of a centrally located park to serve the residents of Northumberland County.

Other Federal & State Lands (Military & colleges/universities)

Private Sector

The private sector plays a significant role in providing recreational opportunities in the commonwealth. Familiarity with the *Landowner Liability Law, Code of Virginia, Chapter 29.1-509* could encourage some landowners to enter into an agreement with a Draft VOP – PD 17- Northern Neck

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unit of government to provide public access while minimizing their liability. As many localities prepare for substantial increases in residential growth, consideration must be given for the inclusion of mechanisms within the permitting process to encourage or require the preservation of open space and the development of recreational amenities to meet communities' needs.

Because of the abundance of water resources in the region, there are a number of water-based recreational opportunities that could be explored. There is a major need for additional water access for boating and fishing. Facilities such as marinas, dry storage areas, fishing piers, bait and tackle shops, and food service establishments are needed to support these activities. In addition, water-to-land access points are also in demand, thus facilities that provide safe areas for boats to dock for overnight stays, meals or sight seeing are desirable. Boat-in bed and breakfasts might also be popular additions for this region. Another private sector opportunity would be the conversion of abandoned seafood processing facilities into water-based recreational developments.

The 2006 *Virginia Outdoors Survey* identified visiting historic sites, gardens, and natural areas as important activities. The private sector and Northern Neck Tourism Council should continue to expand opportunities for meeting this demand. The Northern Neck PD's annual work plan for 2006-2007 PD includes continuation of support for the Northern Neck Tourism Council and tourism efforts related to outdoor recreation, heritage and ecotourism.

The following general recommendations are made to improve private sector provisions of outdoor recreation.

- Encourage public outdoor recreation providers to partner with multiple private sector organizations.
- Recreational use agreements and/or easements should be encouraged for private property owners providing public recreation opportunities and to make more private lands available for recreation.
- Efforts should be made by DCR and local parks and recreation departments to make existing and potential private sector providers of outdoor recreation, especially where applicable to trails and greenways development, knowledgeable about the Virginia Landowner Liability Law.
- Local, state and federal outdoor recreation providers should support corporate recognition programs and improve corporate recognition for small business willing to incorporate outdoor recreation needs in an environmentally friendly manner.